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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: U.S.-CHINA-TAIWAN RELATIONS

11. Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies focused their April 8 news coverage on Vice President-elect Vincent Siew's planned April 11-13 meeting with Chinese President Hu Jintao at the Boao Forum on Hainan Island (China); on the island's soaring consumer price index; on President-elect Ma Ying-jeou's proposed economic policies; and on reform of the defeated DPP. The pro-unification "United Daily News" front-paged a news story with the headline "Hu and Siew Will Meet One-on-One at the Boao Forum." Also, several papers reported that U.S. President George W. Bush will personally approve the sale of F-16 C/D fighter aircraft to Taiwan after May, or most likely, after Beijing holds the Olympics in August.

12. In terms of editorials and commentaries, an editorial in the pro-independence "Liberty Times" slashed at Vice President-elect Vincent Siew's upcoming meeting with Chinese President Hu Jintao and called it a humiliating trip that surrenders Taiwan's sovereignty. A "United Daily News" analysis, however, said the Hu-Siew meeting will create a new model for Beijing to figure out how to communicate with Taipei. An op-ed in the centrist, KMT-leaning "China Times" said: "Of the election of the Ma-Siew ticket, Siew's trip will be akin to a trip from a tribute country, which will surrender Taiwan's sovereignty and humiliate our nation if Beijing fails to confirm and respect Siew's capacity as a quasi-Vice President. Also, the Taiwan people will not understand or forgive such a move that tramples on Taiwan's sovereignty. ..."

"... Vice President-elect Siew's erroneous display of self disparagement can actually be traced back to the thinking behind President-elect Ma's remarks in Taiwan that 'one China is the Republic of China,' the '1992 consensus' indicates 'one China with respective interpretations,' or those to the international community that '[Taiwan] will join the World Health Organization under the name Chinese Taipei.' The essence of [Ma and Siew's] thinking is to curry favor with China to the extent that [Taiwan] is willing to flinch and emasculate itself, or even to sacrifice its status when it is related to sovereignty. Based on such a foundation of turning over [Taiwan's] sovereignty [to China], it is really doubtful to see how wisely the Ma-Siew team will present itself in terms of their ability and strategy to carry out their pledge to the Taiwan people -- namely, cross-Straits talks that will be peaceful, on an equal footing and beneficial to Taiwan. ..."

B) "Hu-Siew Meeting, a New Model for Beijing to Figure out How to Communicate [with Taiwan]"

Journalist Lai Ching-hung noted in an analysis in the pro-unification "United Daily News" [circulation: 400,000] (4/8):

"... Unlike [former President] Lee Teng-hui's style of sending 'secret envoys' to China or the [cross-Straits] tension during the reign of Chen Shui-bian, Beijing expects that the two sides of the Taiwan Strait can have friendlier interactions after Ma Ying-jeou and Vincent Siew take the helm. It seems to be a viable approach to build a cooperative model between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait that differs from Lee's secret envoys, Chen's frontline propaganda, or the KMT-Chinese Communist Party cooperation platform. Beijing also hopes to build a high-level communication channel so as to better and more quickly understand Ma's mainland policy and shorten its distance with him. The upcoming Hu-Siew meeting will mark the beginning of friendly contact and an initial step to build a cooperation platform [across the Taiwan Strait], but it surely will not be a venue to resolve bilateral disputes."

C) "Challenges Posed by Ma Ying-jeou's Victory on Beijing"

Jing Huang, an independent commentator who used to work for the Brookings Institution, opined in the centrist, KMT-leaning "China Times" [circulation: 400,000] (4/8):

"... Over the past years under Chen Shui-bian's reign, one of the biggest losses that Taiwan has suffered is the unprecedented deterioration of Washington-Taipei relations. This development has, objectively speaking, brought about common interests between Washington and Beijing in the Taiwan issue, thus resulting in Washington's and Beijing's joint efforts to prevent Taiwan 'independence' and to 'manage' the status quo across the Taiwan Strait. Ma Ying-jeou declared in public that after the KMT comes back to power, he will seek to maintain the cross-Straits status quo using his three 'Noes' policy -- namely, no unification, no independence and no use of force. This policy is not only the best option to restore Washington-Taipei relations but also a basic approach to resolve 'co-management' by Washington and Beijing on the

cross-Strait situation, deterring Beijing's policy over the recent years to 'restrain Taiwan by way of Washington.'

"As long as the cross-Strait status quo can be maintained, Washington will surely adjust its Taiwan policy based on its own strategic interests and will stick to its position in the cross-Strait relations. These three forces, like the three legs of a tripod, are certainly a solid framework. But if the three legs each do things in their own ways based on their own interests without coordinating with each other, how will the 'tripod' remain steady? ..."

D) "Washington Sends Mixed Signals"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" [circulation: 30,000] editorialized (4/8):

"... Again last week, Washington demonstrated that the manner in which governments formulate policy is anything but rational, and seldom the result of a decision by a single actor. On the Gordian knot that is the Taiwan Strait, Washington has long been of two voices - the Pentagon's and the State Department's. While the former emphasizes arming Taiwan in a balance-of-power struggle with China, the latter strives for better relations with Beijing, often to the detriment of Taipei, democracy and human rights in general. What happens when two such lines of direction clash is mixed signals, which is what we were served last week in a Congressional Research Service (CRS) report on the impact of last month's election.

"One should not be surprised, then, if in the past year or so, this resulted in a sometimes overt, sometimes underhanded, support for Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) president-elect Ma Ying-jeou, who was seen as key to diminishing tensions in the Strait. While it would be unfair, given the wide margin of victory, to blame the State Department for the DPP's loss in the election, it remains that eight years of heavy criticism cannot have helped its candidate's cause. When Ma won, we could almost hear the sigh of relief blowing across the Pacific. At last, friendlier ties in the Strait, a chance for peace.

"The festive mood lasted a week or so, whereupon other voices in Washington began to resonate. It now seemed that Taiwan may perhaps be growing too close to China, which, as the CRS report stated, could threaten US interests in the region and have a negative impact on weapons sales to Taiwan. All of a sudden, peace no longer seemed to be such a good thing. What this all means is that rather than speaking in a single voice, governments (at least democratic ones) have at their core conflicts of interest and Washington's wavering over the past eight years was an expression of that reality. It may very well be that in the next weeks and months, the voices clamoring for not-so-friendly ties in the Taiwan Strait will be in the ascendance. Should this be the case, Ma may have more in common with Chen than he'd care to admit."

YOUNG